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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES,
COOPERATING.

STATES RELATIONS SERVICE, OFFICE OF
EXTENSION WORK, NORTH AND WEST,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUB WORK.

CAPONS AND CAPONIZING.

Prepared by the Animal Husbandry Division, Bureau of Animal Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

Capon is the name applied to the unsexed male chicken. Caponizing is the process of unsexing or altering. When a cockerel is

caponized male bird becomes tough and stringy with maturity. The flesh of the capon, on the other hand, retains the softness and tenderness of young birds and is in consequence vastly superior for eating. Because of this better table quality, the price received for capons will be considerably greater than that for cocks, often being twice as great or more. The capon grows for a longer period and to a larger size than the cockerel and also fattens more readily. (See fig. 2.)



FIG. 1.—Poultry club members caponizing.

caponized both his disposition and appearance are changed. He becomes more quiet and docile, shows no disposition to fight and is easy to keep within bounds. The true capon seldom crows. The comb and wattles develop little or none, making the head appear small and more feminine in character.

PURPOSE OF CAPONIZING.

Caponizing is practiced for two reasons: To secure a better quality of flesh, and to take advantage of the better price paid for capons as compared with cocks. The flesh of an un-

ADVISABILITY OF CAPONIZING.

The question of whether to caponize surplus cockerels or to turn them off as broilers will depend very largely upon local markets and conditions. Since the capons must be held and grown until winter, they take up some room which might in some cases be used to better advantage for laying hens. In this case it would pay better to sell the young males as broilers. Then, too, the local market must show a demand for this class of poultry and the prices paid must be good to make caponizing profitable. There can be no question, however, that it is more profitable to caponize than to allow surplus males to develop into cocks, as these bring the lowest price of any class of table poultry. A few capons are very desirable for home use, as they furnish carcasses of good size and unsurpassed quality.

BREEDS BEST ADAPTED TO CAPONIZING.

Large capons bring the best prices. It does not, therefore, pay to caponize males of the small breeds such as the Leghorn. Yellow legs and skins, as in other classes of table poultry, are most popular. The breeds best adapted

to this purpose are the Plymouth Rock, Brahma, Cochin, Cornish, Langshan, and Wyandotte. The Light Brahma has been one of the most popular birds for caponizing, but the Barred and White Plymouth Rocks and crosses between either of these and the Light Brahmas are widely used.

THE TIME TO CAPONIZE.

Cockerels should be caponized as soon as they are large enough for the operation to be performed easily. This will be when they weigh from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, or when they are

means of cords passed about the wings and the legs and weighted with weights equivalent to that of half bricks. (See fig. 3.) The operation must be performed out of doors in a sun-lighted space, or else artificial light must be reflected into the body cavity in order to allow the operator to locate and remove the testicles. A set of special caponizing instruments is necessary, and can be bought of any poultry supply house. The essential instruments are a sharp-pointed knife, a spreader for holding the ribs apart, a sharp-pointed hook, and the testicle remover. Feel along the side of the

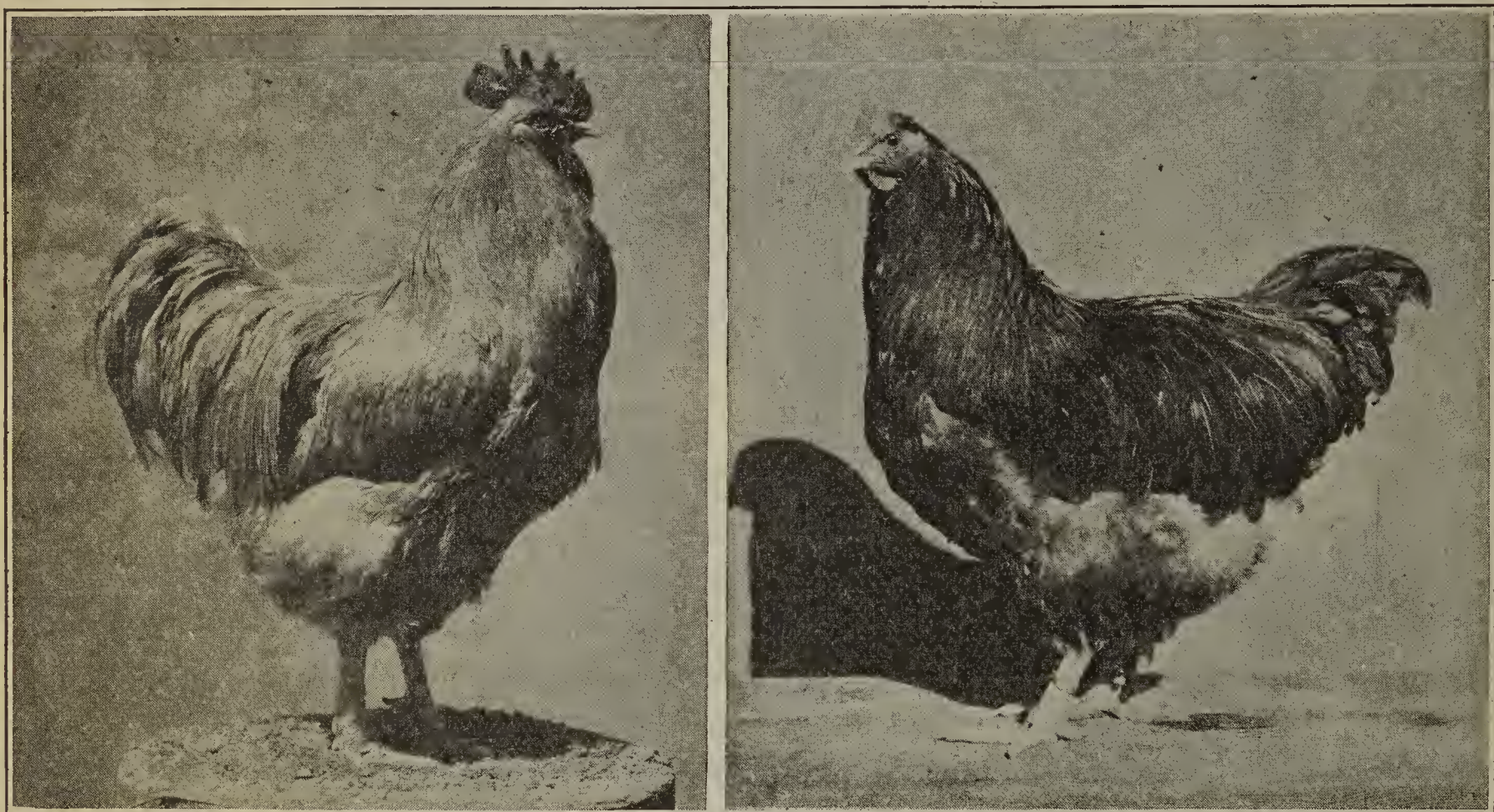


FIG. 2.—Buff Orpington cock (on left); Buff Orpington capon (on right).

from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 months old. Cockerels can be caponized when larger and older than this, but there is greater danger of losing the birds from pricking the spermatic arteries and causing the bird to bleed to death. Caponizing is usually done in June, July, and August.

THE OPERATION.

Cockerels to be operated upon must be confined and given no feed or water for 24 to 36 hours. This serves to empty the intestines and enables the testicles to be located and removed more easily. The bird is laid upon its side on a box, head of a barrel, or a table of convenient height, and held in a stretched out position by

body and locate the two last or lower ribs. Make the incision with a sharp-pointed knife between these two ribs (see fig. 4), but before making the incision pull the skin down toward the leg. Then when the operation is over and the bird is released, the skin slips over the wound and closes it. Insert the spreader and enlarge the cut sufficiently to allow the introduction of the testicle remover, but do not cut too far toward the backbone, or into the fleshy part of the body wall, as that will cause profuse bleeding. A thin membrane will be observed covering the intestines. This must be torn with the sharp-pointed hook. The intestines are then exposed and if these are

pushed aside, two small, white or yellowish (sometimes dark colored) bodies will be observed, one on each side of the backbone, and close to it. These are the testicles. Remove these with the testicle remover, taking the lower one first. Persons not expert at caponizing often find it impossible to locate the lower testicle. In this case, the upper can be removed, the bird turned over, and the other testicle removed through an incision on the other side. Care must be observed in removing the testicles not to prick or rupture the arteries which run close to them. Should this occur, the bird will bleed to death. Be sure that the entire testicle is removed. If a piece is left, the bird will act and look like a cockerel instead of a capon, and

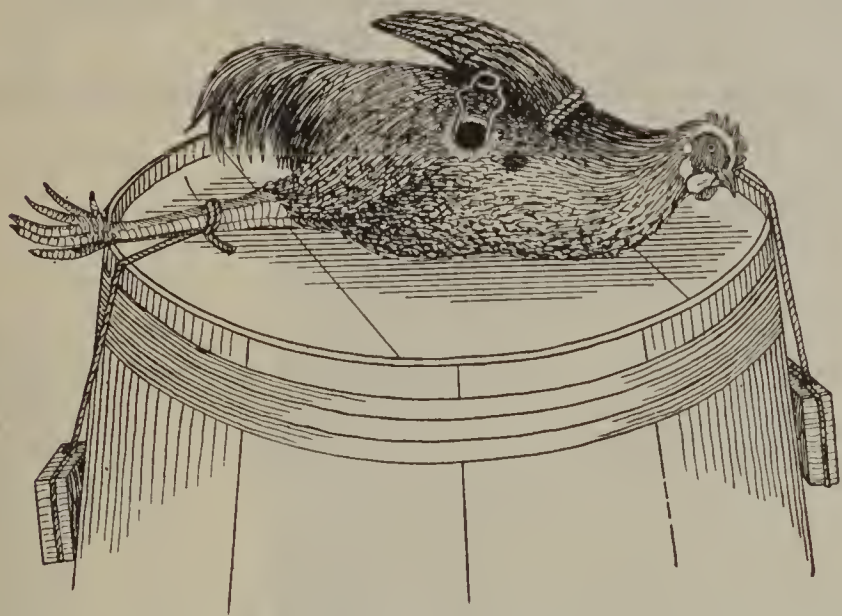


FIG. 3.—Method for securing fowls for caponizing; also spreader in place.

will sell for less than capon prices. Such a bird is known as a slip. It is advisable for a beginner to practice this operation upon a dead fowl. The place to make the incision, the location of the testicles, etc., can be definitely learned in this way and confidence gained in caponizing live birds. The operation is not difficult, but it requires practice to enable one to caponize quickly and certainly. Even with skilled caponizers some birds will be lost, but this should not be more than 2 or 3 per cent. Any birds that may be killed during the operation are perfectly suitable for eating and consequently are not an entire loss.

CARE AFTER THE OPERATION.

Caponizing seems to inconvenience the birds very little. After they are released from the operating table they may be confined in a

closed yard where they can be kept quiet. No roosts are provided, as the less jumping and flying they do the sooner the wound will heal. They may be fed just as usual, or if preferred, only soft feed can be given for a day or two. For a week or ten days, the capons should be carefully observed to see whether any are "wind puffed." This condition is caused by air gathering under and puffing out the skin near the wound. It can be relieved by pricking the skin with the point of a knife and pressing out the air.

FEEDING CAPONS.

Capons should be fed a good growing ration until about two weeks before it is desired to market them. They should then be given a fattening ration. They can be fattened either in a small pen or by confining them in feeding coops or crates.

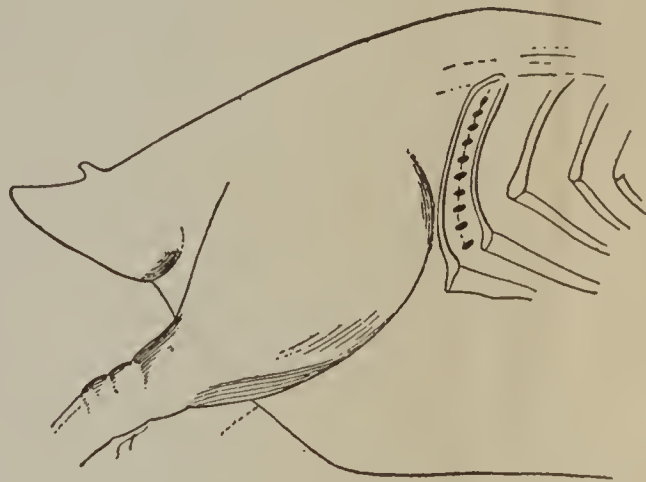


FIG. 4.—Diagram showing where incision should be made between last two ribs.

KILLING AND DRESSING.

In killing, the capon is suspended by means of a cord around the feet. The veins in the back of the throat just beyond the angle of the jaw are severed by a single sweep of the knife and the point of the knife is then plunged through the groove in the roof of the mouth, to the brain. This causes a convulsion which loosens the feathers and allows them to be plucked easily. Capons should always be dry picked, and the feathers of the neck and head, the tail feathers, those a short way up the back, the feathers of the last two joints of the wing, and those of the leg, about one-third of the way from the hock to the hip joint, should be left unplucked. These feathers, together with the characteristic head are the signs by which the capon is known. Cutting off the head or

picking clean is likely to result in not securing capon prices for the fowls. After plucking, the capons should be hung in a cool place until all the animal heat is out of the body before they are shipped.

NOTE.—This is one of a series of follow-up circulars (the K series) printed for the exclusive use of club members and club leaders. Other persons desiring poultry literature should write to their State agricultural college or ask for bulletins noted below.

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(Issued April 16, 1918.)